Mediterraneans or Crusaders?
Israel Geopolitical Images
between East and West

DAVID OHANA
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

MEDITERRANEANISM IS AN OLD-NEW IDEA which has reappeared in the last decade in connection with the politics of Israeli identity and the rise of multiculturalism in Israel. Israel as a Mediterranean society-in-the-making has emerged from Zionism, the liberation movement of the Jewish people in Europe, which supposed that a new Jew returning from exile in order to rebuild his nation-state as an immigrant would reconnect with his or her Biblical-Oriental roots. However, against these expectations, Israel began to be seen by its Arab neighbours as a national mutation of modern crusaders coming from the West to create a 'Europe overseas.' From the creation of the state, there has been a vital cultural discourse in Israel on its collective identity, a discourse which has moved between the open Mediterranean image and the alienated crusader-colonialist image. By looking into these two geopolitical concepts the article seeks to examine the genealogy of the cultural discourse, trace the political development of the crusader myth and consider a potential Mediterranean option in Israel both as a threat and as a hope.

CONFRONTATION OR DIALOGUE?

One of the Crusader settlers in Jerusalem who came from Chartres in France described some tensions and conflicts involved in the formation of a new society in the Levant and the confrontation between East and West with an artistic touch (Hagenmeyer 1913, 748–49):

Consider how in our days God has brought us westerners to the East, for we who were westerners have become easterners. Someone who was a Roman or a Frank is now a Galilean or a Palestinian. A man from Rheims or Chartres is now an inhabitant of Tyre or An-

tioch. We have already forgotten our places of birth; many of us are no longer familiar with them or no longer remember them. There are some here who have taken themselves wives not only from their own people but also from the women of Syria and Armenia, and even of the Circassians who have received the grace of baptism. In some cases their father-in-law is with them together with their bride or bridegroom, and in some cases their stepson or stepfather is with them. And there are grandchildren and great-grandchildren [...] A variety of languages have been exchanged for a single one which is known to both races, and faith unites people whose forebears were foreign to one another [...] Foreigners have become natives here, and converts have become like residents. Every day our parents and relatives join us, hesitantly leaving behind what they possess [...] They have seen that a great miracle has taken place here, a miracle that astounds the whole world. Has one ever heard of such a thing?

Is this the realized utopia of the East-West synthesis, a kind of fusion or symbiosis? Whatever the case, this is an extraordinary description which illustrates the point that the Crusades have generally been viewed as a confrontation between East and West and have further on grown into a confrontation between Western and Eastern Christians. Linked to this there is a rumor that it was precisely Eastern Christians who invited Saladin to conquer Jerusalem (p. 29). If this be the case with the regard to Eastern Christians, how much greater was the tension between the European West and the Islamic East! (Prawer 1972; 1980; 1988). The image of medieval Christians in the Levant was of a foreign element in the Oriental sphere. The image has survived until the modern times: just like in the Middle Ages 'the West in the East' took the form of the Crusaders in the nineteenth century 'the East in the West' took the form of the Ottomans, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century Osama bin Laden called for Jihad against the 'Crusader-Jewish Alliance'. In this way, with the 'crusader' responsibility for the foundation of the 'Western' State of Israel in the Middle East, Osama managed to build the necessary motivation for his people to commit world terrors.

In contrast with the contentious image of the Crusades, 'Mediter-

raneanism' had the reputation of being a source of dialogue between the East and West. It is true that the Annals of the Mediterranean Basin recount of an ongoing conflict for political hegemony, cultural control and economic imperialism but these tensions go back to the struggles between the North and South in the Mediterranean, for example, the Persian War, Peloponnesian War, Macedonian Wars and Punic Wars. These wars were later succeeded by a struggle between East and West, between Hellenists and Romans, the result of which was the first political and cultural union, created by the Romans, embracing the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Nevertheless the Muslim conquest managed to shatter this unity. From the eighth to the eighteenth century the Sea was split in two, to its northern (Christian) part against its southern (Muslim) part. Historical events such as the Crusades, the Ottoman conquest in the East and the Spanish Reconquista in the West, the campaigns of Napoleon, modern colonial settlements and the World Wars in the twentieth century – all these events were tense encounters pitting nations, cultures and religions against one another (Braudel 1949).

Yet, despite these historical confrontations, the Mediterranean includes both the Levant and the West, and out of this synthesis the European space and Western culture were created. The Mediterranean did not give rise to a hegemonic and all-inclusive culture with a single, homogeneous character. Instead it created a variety of historical models of cultural meetings and exchanges of intellectual goods, such as the Italian Renaissance or Christian-Muslim-Jewish Andalusia. As the French historian Fernand Braudel put it: 'To sail in the Mediterranean is to discover the Greek world in Lebanon, prehistory in Sardinia, the cities of Greece in Sicily, the Arab presence in Spain and Turkish Islam in Yugoslavia' (Braudel 1985, 1). The Mediterranean, although not representing a homogeneous cultural unity, has historically been a space with an intense mixture of Eastern and Western cultures. The historian Shlomo Dov Goitein claimed that Jews were Mediterranean people – open, free, mobile, not isolated in their space in Southern Asia but dwelling in countries which inherited classical culture and assimilated it to Islamic culture (Goitein 1967–1988; 1960, 29–42). In his monumental five-volume study, *A Mediterranean Society*, Goitein de-

scribed the medieval Jewish society living within the Mediterranean geographical and cultural framework.

ISRAEL: A MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY IN THE MAKING

In order to understand the geopolitics of any country it is crucial to understand its cultural context in a historical perspective (Newman 1988, 1–16). The claim that Israel is 'a Mediterranean society in the making' was encouraged by three historical processes. The first process is represented by frequent oscillations during the peace process between Israel and its neighbors in the last decade, and further by the state of confrontation culminating in the current conflict with the Palestinians, which erupted in October 2000. The conflict raised questions with regard to the dynamics of Israeli collective identity and to what I call 'Israeli spatial identity'.[1] Many Israelis have thus started to think in terms of 'Mediterraneanism' rather than in terms of 'Middle Eastern' culture. Such thinking was spurred in view of Israeli accessibility to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea — i. e., Turkey and the Maghreb in the 1990s (Ohana 2003).

The second process is the transition of Israeli society from a mobilized society with a Zionist ideology to a civil, sectorial society: one which is in constant search for its own identity while it tries to maintain an internal dialogue among its various sociological components, and in addition to this, an external dialogue with other people and cultures in the Mediterranean geopolitical region (Wistrich and Ohana 1995). The ideology of a 'new man' gave way to the old-new idea of a non-ideological Mediterranean melting pot blending together immigrants from east and west, from the Christian countries and the Muslim countries (Ohana 1995, 38–60; Ohana 2003, 59–75; Ohana 2006, 239–63). This new identity was not ideologically based; it was created by geography and culture.

The third process is the revolutionary opening for dialogue at the Oslo Accords (1993), Barcelona Process (1995) and Sarkozy's Union for the Mediterranean (2008). The Oslo Accords were in principle based on two parallel channels: the immediate bilateral channel which focused on resolving the disputes from the past and ending the war between Israel and its Arab neighbors; and the multilateral channel. The latter provided a basis for (and strengthened) the bilateral channel by creating a safety net along with other actors and by developing common interests and coping with common problems such as water supply, economic growth, disarmament and environmental issues (Peres 1993). The Barcelona Process mainly encouraged cultural and economic cooperation between the European Community and countries surrounding the Mediterranean Basin (Government of Israel 1995). The Barcelona Declaration proposed a plan of action to fix the framework and establish the priorities of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Among the latter the following are notable: the continuation of structural reforms for socio-economic changes, support for regional integration, investment and enhancement of co-operation between businesses (Institut Català de la Mediterrània 1996). The new initiative of French president Nicolas Sarkozy, based on a plan for a political, economic and cultural union of the coastal states of the Mediterranean, which was launched at the Paris Conference on July 14, 2008. The invitation to Israel to participate in the Mediterranean Union presents another chance for dialogue between Israel and its Arab neighbors, this time under the Mediterranean umbrella (Emerson 2008).

THE 'NEW HEBREW' COMES TO THE EAST

Zionism sprang up against the background of the rise of nationalism, the spread of secularism and the dominance of Eurocentricity. One of the chief cultural ambitions of the Zionist movement was to create a 'new man'. The myth of a 'new Jew' came into being only when the idea of an independent Jewish nationality was accepted and realized in the State of Israel. It was believed that there was an affinity between people and the land; only in the East, in the land of the forefathers, would the desired change in the image of the Jews take place. The realization of Zionism in Israel linked ideology to geography, and history to spatial identity.

One of the paradoxes of the situation was that from the 1880s onwards one of the models for the creation of a 'new Jew' were the Arabs. The Arabs were seen by some of the Zionists as an exemplar of be-

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longingness, of existential and natural connection with the land. The East was not only a place of refuge from the Jewish exile in Europe, but also a source of vitality and a place where individual and national personalities could be renewed (Zalmona 1998, ix–xv).

[12] Zionism was from its early days on characterized by a highly ambivalent approach to the East. One of those who rejected the eastern option was also Theodor Herzl and his book *The Jewish State:* 'For Europe we will constitute a bulwark against Asia, serving as guardians of culture against barbarism.' This approach was contested by some Zionist ideologues who discerned vital values in the East. That is why in 1925 Ben-Gurion stated that 'the significance of Zionism is that we are, once again, becoming Oriental people'. However, Ben Gurion's attitude could also be ambivalent, as can be seen in a letter he wrote to George Antonius:[2]

> Although we are Eastern people we have become a European people, and we wish to return to the Land of Israel only in the geographical sense. Our aim is to create a European culture here, and we are at any rate linked to the major cultural force in the world as long as the cultural basis in this part of the world does not change.

But Ben-Gurion supported the Mediterranean option for Israel. Two years after the founding of the state of Israel he declared (Ben-Gurion 1954, 312–3):

> Our forefathers, who had never sailed its length as their kinfolk of Sidon did, called the Mediterranean the Great Sea […] there is nothing, nothing, like the sea to widen our worlds, to increase our sense of security, to develop our latent powers […] the conquest of the sea is among man's most glorious and creative adventures: without it the story of civilization, of the spread and associations of the human race, could not have been written. Our small country will flourish and expand once we perceive that the coast-line is no boundary but a corridor, into a colossal empire […]

The Zionist approach to the East is a particular instance of the Orientalist outlook; that is, the way in which the West relates to the Eastern region of the Mediterranean (Said 1978). This kind of orientalistic attitude can be seen in other volatile areas of the Mediterranean such as the Balkans (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Herzfeld 1987; Todorova 1997). It is, however, a far more complex approach than that [13] of typical European Orientalism, since within this approach the East is seen not only as the locus of the ancient history of the Jewish people, but also as the supreme aim of the people's envisaged return to themselves. It is the source and the cure to the national plight of the Jewish people integral to its national identity. However, the approach to an equal extent also represents 'the other', fundamentally exterior to the Zionist Jew and identified as 'there' whether as an alien, even antagonistic, entity or as the object of an unquenchable aspiration. The increasing lure of the East in the eyes of the nineteenth-century European Romantics and the prevailing sense among the intelligentsia that the West was in a state of decline, together with a yearning for primordial 'true' and 'sound' foundations, prompted the Jews with Zionist inclinations to see in the East not only a cradle of their national identity or a safe haven, but also a source of values, strength and moral regeneration for their people.

Until the 1930s, the Zionists saw in the East an object of longing and desire, a source of power and an opportunity for redemption. At the same time, however, they also took the position of Western superiority, took over the attitude of fear and suspicion, a thing which made them see the East as a threat. In the wake of the 1929 Arab riots a rift was created between the Jews and Arabs, and the period of Jewish separatism began, during which all signs of Orientalism were suppressed. Since then the East has been perceived as a political reality, a place of 'otherness,' a sort of absence or gap, rather than an object of identification reflecting positive values. Thus, the perception of the East has been changed by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The East has always seemed foreign to many Israelis – either to those who wanted to make sense of it, become a part of it and internalize it, or (all the more so) to those who wanted nothing to do with it. The Oriental tradition has never been adopted by the Zionist settlers in Palestine; instead it simply remained a spice in the new

national-popular recipé. The pioneering society remained essentially Eurocentric and regarded itself as an extension of the European culture and not a product of the Mediterranean culture and certainly not of the Arab culture. In practice, this represented the abandonment of the Eastern culture in favor of Western values and modernity (Ohana 1999, 81–99).

THE 'NEW CRUSADERS' IN ARAB EYES

Arab scholars, writers and politicians nurture the Crusader myth of Zionism and Israelism in order to prove that Israel is a Western-colonialist entity in the Eastern Arab area. The Zionist-crusader analogy seeks to find a common denominator between the Crusader colonialism of the Middle Ages, 'Zionist colonialism' and the Anglo-French variety of colonialism. Wadia Talhook's book *A New Crusade in Palestine* came to birth on the eve of the War of 1948, and compared the Zionist enterprise to the Crusades (Sivan 1998, 18). The conclusion is that 'we shall cleanse Palestine of the star of David just as we cleansed it of the Crusades.' The Arab anti-colonialism is represented as a war of Muslims against the Crusaders. Those who drove the Crusaders away, like Saladin, Beybars and Nureddin (they were actually Turks and Kurds), were regarded as Islamic heroes. The religious aspect of the conflict is played down and the national aspect is emphasized; a moral duality, generally structured on belligerent myths, is in this way created between barbaric Crusaders and chivalrous Muslims; and the mythological construction has been in this way made out of Zionist-crusader invasion, an ideological construction that serves the purposes of the present (Benvenisti 2000, 299–303).

Zionism is depicted as a religious movement, nationally oppressive towards the local population and economically exploitative towards the Arabs. This foreign régime, alien to the locals, is said to have no culture of its own and to lack all national authenticity; and thus represents the soldier-pioneer of degenerated Western civilization, which will collapse as soon as the United Front is presented against him.

Through the 'Crusader' prism we have opted to study, major cross-currents in the Israeli thought may be detected. Although the crusader-Zionist analogy is not central to the Israeli discourse, the many treatments the subject has been given show that the historical parallel which Arab circles have made between the medieval Christians in the Holy Land and the modern Jews in Israel has not been lost on Israeli intellectuals. Even when not dealing directly with the local conflict, the Israelis amongst themselves discuss the Crusader equation with an acute sense of their own 'foreignness' in the area, and in this perspective, the 'other' in their discussions becomes 'us' (Israelis). The Israeli participants in the 'Crusader discourse' are engaged in a veiled dialogue in which the analogy is not the subject of a historical debate or of a factual investigation of the truth. The thing that is involved here are the origins, no less than the future, of the Jewish state at the heart of Arab-Muslim East. Has the analogy itself become a kind of mobilizing symbol? How are the principles, images and perceptions corresponding to its political viewpoint and general outlook selected? (Kedar 2000, 135–50.)

A historical episode in the history of Palestine, not linked to the Jewish history of the Land of Israel, has become a fascinating episode in the clarification of the Israeli identity and self-image. It is as if a picture of a historical phenomenon has been created and those that look at it are asking themselves if they see themselves within it. The Arabs answer positively; the Israelis for the most part answer negatively. The analogy can serve as a pretext for posing the question 'Who are we?' except, this time, in its reverse form, 'Who aren't we?' The question 'Are we Crusaders?' proceeds from the question 'Are we colonialists?' In other words, Zionist-crusader analogy reflects a veiled debate, sometimes turning to alarm, in which the Colonialist question is broached without being called by its name. Until the advent of the post-Zionists, the interpretation of the Zionist enterprise as a colonialist project had only been hinted at. Post-Zionists renewed the open discussion of the question (Kimmerling 1983; Shafir 1987; Pappe 1992).

Before the outbreak of the Six-Day War, Nasser was compared to a legendary leader who had defeated foreign invaders in the distant past. The weekly journal *El-Howdat* informed its readers that since Salah ed-Din el-Iobi (Saladin), the Arabs had not had a leader like Abdul Nasser. Saladin continued to be a mobilizing symbol of Jerusalem liberation, 'of Muslim unity, religious sacrifice, selfless struggle, and the

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victory of faith.' A brigade of the PLO's Army for the Liberation of Jerusalem was called Hattin; section 15 of the Hamas Charter praised Saladin as their role model; the Yom Kippur War was described as the first Arab victory since Saladin; the civil war in Lebanon was called the 'Tenth Crusade', in which the Maronites were compared to Franks. The 'Peace for Galilee' War was said to be the 'twelfth crusade', in which Beirut served as a feudal fief of the Crusader Iblin dynasty. In addition, during the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein proclaimed: 'Salah ed-Din el-Iobi can now loudly cry Allah Akbar (God is Great)!' From the day Yasser Arafat returned from Camp David talks in the summer 2000, Palestinian media never stopped praising him and comparing him to the legendary commander. From the beginning of the 'El Aqsa Intifada' Arafat, in his speeches, continually declared that 'We shall return to Jerusalem and El Aqsa, entered by Salah ed-Din el-Iobi.'

There has been the continuous presence of the myth of Saladin in Arab history. The myth was originally directed against European Colonialism and Western civilization, however, in the last fifty years the symbol has been applied to the Arab-Israeli conflict and directed mainly against the 'Zionist entity'. Even when Dr. Ziad J. Asali tried to make an objective evaluation of Israeli historical scholarship concerning the Crusades, he was unable to refrain from making a comparison, and under the subtitle 'Zionism Between East and West', wrote (Asali 1992, 45–59):

Zionism is in fact the heir – albeit an illegitimate one – of the Crusader movement. It was born out of the depth of the Crusader residue in Western societies as it combined the dreams of the re-conquest of the Holy Land with the historical antipathy toward the Easterners, along with a solution of the Jewish problem in the West. The Zionist movement has interjected a factor that has contributed decisively to the reception of its ideology among modern Western societies.

In his book *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* the Franco-Lebanese author Amin Maaluf managed to avoid drawing parallels between the Crusader past and the Arab-Zionist dispute. Maaluf saw the crusader

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invasion mainly as an episode in the confrontation between the East and West. He also stressed the sensitivity that has to be shown towards the Arabs in depicting the past in the view of their sense of persecution and threats proceeding from the West (Maalouf 1984).

THE ISRAELI 'CRUSADER DISCOURSE': EAST VERSUS WEST

It is hardly surprising that in Israeli 'Crusader discourse' an intellectual effort has been made in order to confront various images and parallels inherent in the Crusader myth. Against the background of the disturbances in 1929, Shemuel Ussishkin, a publicist and the son of Menahem Ussishkin, wrote his first book [in Hebrew] on the Crusades under the title *The West in the East: The History of the Crusades in Palestine* (1931). The book was not a rebuke or an apology but a lesson dealing with a test-case in which the past could serve the needs of the present by providing an instructive example of the Western culture situated in the heart of the East (Ussishkin 1931, 3):

There can be nothing more dangerous than a historical analogy if overstated. The danger is to draw conclusions concerning the events of the day through a comparison with the past on the sole basis of an external resemblance, without taking into account all the differences in time and conditions. At the same time one should not rule out the possibility of learning about the situation through a study of similar situations. For that reason, the history of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem has a special interest for the Zionists. Although the Latins of the Middle Ages who came to the country to set up a Christian state were Christians, not Jews by religion, Aryans, not Semites by race, lived in a different period and used totally different means from those used by the Zionists in our time, the problem they were confronted with was almost identical to that facing the children of Israel who seek to return to their land nowadays.

The main question faced by the Crusaders was how to set up in the midst of oriental Muslim states a Christian center which would be different from its neighbors in religion, origin, language and cul-

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ture – one which would spring from the West and was nurtured by it. Zionists are confronted with the same question asking how one can set up in the midst of the Muslim states a Jewish center which would be different from the neighboring states in religion, culture, origin and language – one which would be created by external forces coming from the West? The Zionists are nevertheless different from the Crusaders.

From the analogy made by the Muslims between the Christian past and the Jewish present it can be inferred that the Arabs had to learn from their heroic past to unite their ranks behind a historic leader who would expel the infidels. Ussishkin, on the other hand, does not see this as the main point. His interest in the analogy is different: he seeks to discover how to prevent the collapse of the Western civilization which has settled itself in the East. Where race and origins are concerned – he points out – the Jews are not part of the Western world, especially because their roots are in the East and they are closer to Muslims. However, it cannot be denied that the majority of Zionists and Jewish immigrants are Westerners and not Orientals, and the matter of their integration into the East raises questions similar to those which arose at the time of the Crusades in Palestine.

These questions also preoccupied the Israeli publicist Moshe Fogel, who claimed that the Crusades were a major link in the chain of the long historical duel between East and West. According to him the expressions 'East' and 'West' should not be understood only in the terms of geography and religion, but also in the terms of material and spiritual culture, and ideals of a civilization. The Jews played an important part in this confrontation and swung like a pendulum between East and West. In the Greco-Persian War, the Jews were in the eastern camp, but the West won and it seemed that Hellenism might conquer the world. The revolt of Maccabees against Hellenism was a continuation of the battle of Marathon but this time the East celebrated the victory. The West nevertheless reacted when the kingdom of Byzantium became so 'orientalized' that during the Crusades there was very little cultural difference between the Christian Constantinople and Muslim Damascus or Baghdad. Western Europe freed

itself from any Eastern influence, and during the Crusader period there was a cultural abyss between Rome and Paris on one hand and Constantinople on the other. The Crusades were a reaction of the West and a continuation of the battle of Marathon disguised as a Christian-Catholic offensive against the Muslim East. Fogel concluded that the confrontation between the West under the leadership of America and the East under the leadership of Russia represented one phase in the battle between civilizations (Fogel 1952):

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> With the establishment of the State of Israel the story of the Crusades opens up new perspectives of immeasurable importance to us. Our position in the Middle East is similar in many ways to that of the Crusaders, and accordingly some manifestations of the Crusader kingdom can serve us as a historical precedent. This precedent is of a very great value in the political sphere.

In 1949, a year after the founding of the State of Israel, the biblical scholar Professor Menahem Haran enumerated three factors which worked to the disadvantage of the Crusader state and which were also relevant in the case of Israel. The first factor maintained that the Crusader State was thrust outwards towards the sea by a unified and powerful Muslim Arab East. Secondly, the Crusaders mainly settled in towns but left most (rural) areas of the state to local Muslims. That is why Crusaders represented overlords and conquerors. Thirdly, there was little immigration from Europe and Crusader settlement in the country was sparse (Haran 1949, 55–9).

With regard to this one might ask what the relevance of all this was for the State of Israel. Haran sought to explain: firstly, the Arab demographic advantage is not a situation which the Israelis can change; they can only make sure they obtain a sufficiently large territorial rear. Secondly, the Israeli Jews continued to maintain the ethnic character of the Israeli settlement in the three generations preceding the founding of the state. Thirdly, in regard to the amount of immigration and the number of the Zionist settlers in the country, Haran (1949, 59) concluded: 'All evidence is in our favor. Our development will inevitably move us towards a different fate.' Haran, in effect, fired the opening

shot of the 'Crusader' discourse soon after the War of Independence. For the first time, a man of academic stature took a stand and initiated an open debate without the fear of historical parallel.

[20] One year later, in 1950, the writer and poet Aharon Amir, writing from an entirely different ideological viewpoint, warned the young Jewish State against pursuing a 'Crusader' policy. In his article, 'The Crusader Kingdom of Israel', which appeared in the journal *The Young [Hebrews]*, Amir cautioned against the policy aiming at total separateness of Israel which would mean that Jewish theocracy is preoccupied with building up its strength against its neighbors. Such a state would be perpetually dependent on external factors like the world Jewry and foreign powers. 'A policy of this kind,' Amir said, 'is definitely "Crusader" policy. The State of Israel is in such a way placed in the situation of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, a military-theocratic kingdom. Such a state perhaps provides a vision (real or fake) for communities overseas on which it depends economically and from which it receives human reinforcements and moral and political assistance, however, such a state has nothing to give and no vision for the people living in the region. What is more there is no common denominator between such Israel and nations surrounding it.' Amir considered that although the idea of comparing the fate of Crusaders with that of the Israelis was not a popular one, the comparison represented the most serious element in the ideological thinking of the Arabs. Thus, he believed that 'a "Crusader" State of Israel, a Zionist State of Israel, could not maintain its power for a longer period of time. Any unexpected gust of wind signifying a sudden change in the balance of world forces would portend disaster. The seal of perdition would be on its brow.' (Amir 1986, 26.)

It should be remembered that the 'crusader syndrome', representing an importation of the Western culture to the East, contradicted the Canaanite ideology to which Amir subscribed; the contradiction was further on discordant with its native ideal of [Hebrew] nationhood in the Mesopotamian region. It is ironic that this fact did not prevent the Canaanites from fostering the Phoenician myth and from trying to prove that the Jews were an Eastern export to the West. In the words of Dan Laor, 'The Canaanites expected the new nation of Israeli natives (whom they preferred to call "Hebrews") to become the avant-garde, the melting-pot of all the ethnic groups in the west-Semitic world, creating a massive, homogeneous Middle-Eastern nation similar to that of the ancient [Hebrews] who had been the dominant national, cultural and political force in the region in biblical times' (Laor 2000, 287–300). Whatever the case, Amir's outlook reflected a kind of 'Hebraic' policy, cut off from the Jewish umbilical cord and liberated from alien ideologies, which gave the Jewish immigrant no preference to the non-Jewish resident of the land and which opened the gates of [Hebrew] society to anyone who desired it. It will not be difficult for a reader to detect the idea of a 'state of all its citizens', a state based on geography rather than history, an idea which is basically Canaanite.

[21] In 1953, in a critical review of *The History of the Crusades* by the Scottish historian Steven Runciman, the editor of the *Ha'aretz* newspaper, Gershon Schocken, claimed that the Israelis had been becoming increasingly interested in the history of the Land of Israel as distinct from the history of the Jewish people. 'The very fact of exile', he said, 'meant that the history of the Jewish people was something different from the history of the Land of Israel.' (Schocken 1953) For nearly two thousand years before, various powers had ruled over the land and had been influenced by the geographical circumstances and political situation. When the Israelis started to function as an independent political factor within their country once more, it was only natural that they wanted to know how other political elements in periods before their settlement had attempted to deal with the problems with which the land confronted all those who wished to rule it. Schocken came to a conclusion that 'Those who wish to draw a parallel between the fate of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the situation of the State of Israel in our time must take into account that the episode of the rise of Saladin [...] does not give one the impression that an inevitable historical development took place here.' (Schocken 1953.)

A year before the Sinai Campaign in 1956, the Israeli journalist Uri Avneri interviewed the English historian Arnold Toynbee. The interview appeared under the title, 'Don't repeat the mistakes of the Philistines and the Crusaders.' Toynbee, who in the tenth volume of

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his *Study of History* marked Zionism as modern colonialism, in 1955 turned to Israelis and addressed them as follows: 'Reliance on the rifle and the bayonet will never give you the assurance that your country belongs to you. Only a deep soul-identification with the country, its past and its future will bring you this certainty. You have to understand that everything connected with your country, even if it does not relate to the Jews, is connected with you directly. You have to learn the history of the country and even that of the Crusaders, for example, for it belongs to you.' (Toynbee 1965, 210–3; Avneri 1955.)

Stephen Runciman repeated the same advice in his answer to Avneri when he asked him whether he had ever thought about the similarity between the Crusaders and the Zionists. 'Not only have I thought about it,' he said, 'but I wanted to add a subtitle: "A Practical Guide for Zionists on How not to Do It." However, my Jewish friends advised me against it.'[3] When Runciman and Avneri met, they constantly found Zionist parallels to Crusader figures and events. Avneri wrote: 'I was fascinated by the following hypothetical question which preoccupied Runciman: Did the Crusaders have any real chance of making peace with the Arab world and "becoming a part of the region", as Raymond, the ruler of Tripoli, proposed or were their tries doomed to failure from the start considering the nature of the Crusader (or, with all due allowances, Zionist) ideology?' (Avneri 1999.)

THE POLITICS OF THE 'CRUSADER MYTH'

Israelis' curiosity about the Crusaders resulted from their growing interest in the history of the land as distinct from that of the people (Kedar 1987). The Zionist educational network, which emphasized the First and Second Temple periods of the nation's history, neglected the periods in which there was no marked Jewish presence in the Land of Israel. People without a land implied a land without people, and a land that was not settled was obviously a land without history. For a long time, the whole period from Bar Kochba until the beginning of Zionist settlement was neglected. The history of the country, as opposed to the history of the Jews within it, was of interest to few. In the second decade after the foundation of the State a new attitude was developed towards the Christian and Muslim periods in the history of

the country. The question of sovereignty was in this way settled and suppression concerning the non-Jewish past of the country therefore diminished.

Joshua Prawer, the outstanding Israeli historian of the Crusader Kingdom in Palestine, lay bare in his studies of an instructive two-hundred-year-long chapter in the history of the Christian West and the Muslim East, a period in which Europeans set up a 'Europe overseas' in Palestine. Some people have seen this as a link in the chain of the ancient traditional hostility between the East and West, Persia and Greece, Hannibal and Rome – a chapter which became eventually known as the 'Orient problem' in European history. Prawer focused on 'a description of the vivid life of the Crusaders, whose ideal was not one of harmony or integration but of continual confrontation on the battlefield, as in the spheres of religion and culture' (Prawer 1984). European victory established a Western society in the East, alien in its culture, religion and customs, in a world whose material and cultural achievements were greater than those of the European conquerors. A confrontation between East and West was thus inevitable.

Only occasionally did Prawer relate specifically to the Zionist-crusader analogy. Like many Israelis, Prawer was worried by the security problems of Israel within its narrow borders. At various academic conferences at which he lectured, he often hinted at present-day security matters while speaking about the history of the Crusader Kingdom.

About two months after the 1967 war, Prawer touched on the central point in the Jews' attachment to their land: 'Throughout the period of exile of the people of Israel, no other people succeeded in striking roots in the land and making it its country.' Prawer repeatedly emphasized the special connection of the people of Israel to its land, in contrast to the Crusaders: 'In the thirteenth century the country lay desolate, and the Crusaders, despite their immense effort for two hundred years to hold onto it, failed, as the Muslims and Mongols also failed' (Prawer 1967).

In March 1973, about half a year before the Yom Kippur War, in the symposium 'Conquerors and Conquered – the Crusader State as a Colonialist State', held in honor of publishing the English edition of

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his book on the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, Prawer said that the Crusader State was a society based on a legitimate claim to ownership of the land. The historian Shlomo Avineri claimed that the true parallel to the Crusader society was not to be found in our part of the world but in South Africa, whose Apartheid régime was also based on ideological Biblical principles and on the analogy between the Blacks and Canaanites in the Bible. The sociologist Moshe Lissac asserted that unlike modern colonialist movements, the Crusaders did not have a metropolis. The right-wing intellectual Israel Eldad observed that although the Crusaders could claim a hereditary title to the country, they had no sense of returning to their homeland. In two hundred years they spent in the country, the word 'homeland' appeared in their writings only once.

In a television program in July 1987, which marked the eight-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Hattin, Prawer spoke of a different attachment to the country of Crusaders and Israelis (Kedar 1992, 27–37):

> I find my roots here, and not in some *shtetl* in Eastern Europe [...] The Crusaders could not have made such a claim. Our roots are here, in this country [...] For us it means returning to the land of our forefathers. This is a concept that doesn't apply to Western Christianity [...] We are a part of the East, for two thousand years we have been returning to the Land of Israel; the Bible is a product of the Land of Israel, and from that point of view to speak of us as being foreign to the place is of course ridiculous.

In Prawer's opinion, partial orientalisation of the Crusaders in the country did not bring them any closer to Muslims but distanced them from their kinsmen and co-religionists in Europe. The estrangement and withdrawal brought them 'to a situation very common in the world of modern colonialism: they grew distant from the mother country but did not reach the natives.' The Crusaders failed because they were finally unable to build a stable colonialist civilization like the Boers in South Africa or the French in Quebec. When Prawer's book on the Crusaders appeared, it gave rise to a lively debate on the significance of

the Zionist-crusader analogy and on Israel's spatial identity between East and West.

In his book *David's Sling*, published in 1970, in the chapter 'The Similar Is Also Dissimilar', Shimon Peres maintained that the Arabs looked for historical precedents to justify their positions, and that their propaganda therefore in a great deal relied on the precedent of the Crusades (Peres 1970, 205–12). According to Peres, the Crusades and the Zionist movement both originated in Europe, were ideologically motivated and sailed across the sea from the West to the Holy Land while contending with superior forces. But the differences were of course greater than the similarities, since the twelfth century is not the same as the twentieth. The Crusades were more religious than political, Crusaders did not seek permanent sovereignty but came for a limited purpose – to protect the Holy Places. They did not come to settle the land, nor did they seek a homeland for homeless people. The Zionist movement, on the other hand, was political despite the fact that it drew from religious cultural sources. The movement was intended to rescue the entire population by gathering it together and resettling it on the soil of its historical homeland. The return to Israel was not a purely religious act but a living experience and a national necessity. The Crusaders started out as an army which came to conquer a relatively populated country; the Zionists did not begin as a movement of military conquest but as a movement of settlers who came to a relatively desolate country. It was the settlers who needed protection and not the other way round; the ploughshare preceded the sword both in theory and practice. The settler movement sought to shape a new form of life, and in this respect Zionism was not only a movement of national liberation but also a movement of social redemption. The crusader army apparently did not number more than 50,000 men, whereas the number of the Jews living in the Land of Israel long ago reached the milestone of two and a half million from which there was no returning. The Crusades received directions from various European centers, while the immigrants to Israel struck roots in the country. These people were not sent by Europe but abandoned it.

Uri Avneri, for his part, also claimed that the Crusaders and Zionists both came from the West (Avneri 1968, 63). Although the Zionists

imagined that they were following the footsteps of the conquerors of Canaan or the 'captives of Zion' (those who returned from Babylon), they, in his opinion, resembled the Philistines and Crusaders who did not speak the language of the country, and were different from the inhabitants in their culture and appearance and first gained a foothold in the coastal plain before penetrating the mountain region which is the heart of the Land of Israel. Just as the Zionists saw themselves as the vanguard of the Jewish people, so the Crusaders regarded themselves as the envoys of Christianity. In both states there was a problem of ethnic hierarchy in which the ruling class came from Europe; in both states there was a dependence on wealth from overseas. Kibbutzim were a unique Zionist creation resembling the great military orders of the Crusades. The Knights Templars or the Knights Hospitallers would set up fortresses deep within Arab areas in the same way as Kibbutzim. Some of these settlements were even built on the ruins of crusader fortresses.

The Crusades have served the purposes both of hawks seeking defence-lines with strategic depth, and of doves demanding territorial compromise and peace-treaties. Yossi Raanan, in his article 'The IDF and the Crusaders', related that during his reserve duty in the Gaza Strip he could not help thinking of the similarity between the convoys of settlers with their military escorts and the convoys of Crusaders: 'It was very difficult for me to shake off the rather depressing feeling that the IDF in the Strip at the present day resembles the crusader army which once ruled in the Land of Israel. This phenomenon is one of the most striking illustrations of the crusader-like character of the government in the Strip.' (Ra'anan 1990.)

The ideas that the settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip see themselves as 'holy emissaries' who have gone out in order to realize a national-religious ideal based on a strong and solid political base which serves them as an available rear, and that these settlers are a kind of modern crusader colonialists were both rejected by Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, one of the leading moderate spokesmen for the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories. 'Yesha (Judea and Samaria),' he said, 'is not "Israel overseas" [...] The Crusaders were *imitators* of the people of Israel, which explains their success and also the partial nature of that

success' (Melzer 2000–2001, 58). Rabbi Menahem Froman, likewise a settler, also thinks that the Zionists do not need to fear any resemblance to the crusader model, although he believes there is some truth in the comparison when it comes to a feeling of foreignness. Thus he proposes an original solution for the Israelis' sense of foreignness in the area,: 'Returning to the Land of Israel means returning to forefathers. Returning to the land is returning to the *fellah*, to the Arab.'

Close to the time of the outbreak of the El Aqsa Intifada in the autumn of 2000, and even more while it was taking place, the Israeli and Palestinian relationship to the Crusaders once more became a topic for discussion. Binyamin Netanyahu's vision of a 'cold peace' raised the specter of the Crusader myth, this time from an unexpected quarter. In his article 'In the Crusader State', the journalist Guy Behor wrote: 'Netanyahu's idea of a "cold peace" means that Israel deliberately isolates itself from its surroundings and becomes a kind of crusader fortress surrounded by ramparts, and those within it care only about one thing: how to defend the walls [...] Throughout the years, Israel fought against its representation as a foreign implant and sought to normalize the relations with its neighbors, until the word "normalization" (in Arabic, *tatvia*) became a dirty word among its opponents. And now, look and behold, according to Netanyahu's vision Israel is about to turn by its own free will into an isolated crusader fortress and in this way demonstrates its alien character, without an attempt to integrate or receive true legitimation in the area!' (Behor 2000) Whereas on the other side, from the day Arafat returned from the Camp David discussions, the Arab media has never stopped praising him as the modern Saladin, and from that time on the Zionist-crusader analogy has not ceased to be on the Palestinian agenda.

At the beginning of the disturbances, Amos Oz, in his article in the *New York Times*, put his finger on the salient point: the choice was between images and myths on one hand and political recognition and historical reconciliation on the other. Oz (2000) described Arafat's return from the failed Camp David summit as follows:

The whole Gaza Strip is covered in flags and slogans proclaiming the Palestinian Saladin. Welcome home, Saladin of our era! is writ-

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ten on the walls. In silence, astounded, I watch, and I can't help reminding myself that the original Saladin promised the Arab people that he would not make pacts with the infidels; he would massacre them and throw them in the ocean. I see Mr. Arafat dressed in his gray-green combat uniform. It's an Arafat clothed like Che Guevara and treated like Saladin: my heart breaks [...] The Palestinians must choose if they want a new Saladin, or to really work for peace.

MEDITERRANEANISM: THREAT OR HOPE?

We have seen how the Crusader parallel runs like a thread through all levels of the Israeli discourse. This preoccupation came to the fore especially in the following three periods: around the time of the 1948 war, before the 1967 war and during the El Aqsa Intifada at present. The apprehension of the Israelis marked with this parallel are a consequence both of external factors, like the Palestinian threat internalized as a future which resembles the past, and of internal factors, like the political controversy between right and left or the post-Zionist questioning which has renewed the colonialist-crusader discourse about the beginnings of Zionism. But above all the parallel has been concerned with the 'alien' Western character of the State of Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin.

It seems that the words of the archaeologist Adrian Boaz are like a voice crying in the wilderness: 'A more realistic approach to the Crusader period might free us from the temptation to see it as a parallel to the Zionist settlement of the Land of Israel, a thing the Jews and Arabs have both done for their own reasons. Such comparisons help us understand neither the Crusades nor the Zionist movement' (1999).

Indeed, when Alexandra Nocke came from the banks of the Rhine to the Eastern Mediterranean in order to investigate the living reality of the Mediterranean Israeli society for her doctoral dissertation (as opposed to society's image as seen from outside) she wrote (2001):

My thesis is that life between these two worlds (East and West) in the Mediterranean region offers many chances for Israel to become integrated within the Middle East without being cut off from the

West. The Mediterranean option, which still appears unfocussed today, is based on common cultural roots, on consensus instead of divergence, on dialogue instead of cultural conflict. As a foreign observer of Israel's quest for identity and consensus – I believe that Israel's future is linked to the Mediterranean dimension that embraces the East *and* the West, while offering a chance for acculturation and dialogue and mutual nurturing.

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And similarly, the eminent Israeli poet Meir Wieseltier (2001) concluded his lecture entitled 'Being Mediterranean – A Threat, A Hope or A Refuge?' as follows:

Our geopolitical and geocultural location governs the nature of our attachments. Israel was never the fifty-somethingth state of the United States of America, as the old dream of some fools in the Israeli élites would have it. And woe be unto us if we see ourselves as the carrier of American aircraft stationed in the eastern Mediterranean! The constant development of Israel's Mediterranean identity from all points of view – economic, political and *cultural* – is a vital necessity for the future of this state. And first of all, we have to accept our affinity with the region and with the Mediterranean wholeheartedly. We must treat it seriously. And until this miracle occurs, we have much work to do in the sphere of culture and cultural dialogue.

The appearance of the Mediterranean option in the Israeli discourse in the 1990's was not new. Already in the late 1950's the essayist and writer Jacqueline Kahanoff (1917–1979) was the forerunner of the Mediterranean identity in Israel. Her early polyphonic voice, Levantine option and multicultural vision were a unique example of a woman providing an avant-garde declaration in the Israeli public sphere. Kahanoff captured the essence of Israel's Mediterranean option in symbiotic terms: 'Israel's situation is unique, because this process of cross-influence and cross-mutation takes place in the same country which is Levantine with regard to its geographical position between East and West, and because of the mixture of its population.' (Ohana 2006, 243.)

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NOTES

1 Spatial Identity: Israeli Culture in the Mediterranean Basin; An international conference held at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 4 April 2001.

2 David Ben-Gurion in a letter to George Antonius (Ben-Ami 1998, 331).

3 Ha'aretz, 11 August 1999; see also the advice of Runciman (1951–1954).

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